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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

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DATE: January 19, 1959

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SUBJECT: Berlin Situation and Related Problems

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Wilhelm G. Grewe, German Ambassador  
Mr. Felix von Eckardt, Chief of the Federal German Press Office  
Deputy Under Secretary Robert Murphy/  
Mr. Martin J. Hillenbrand - GER

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After an exchange of pleasantries, in response to Mr. Murphy's query as to his impressions, Dr. von Eckardt said that his trip to the United States had proved very interesting so far. He had tried to speak to a number of public leaders and had also been interested in obtaining a general sampling of American public opinion on Berlin and the broader German issue. He was pleased to be able to say that everyone had told him, including representatives of both political parties, that they favor a policy of firmness on Berlin. He had found a strong and healthy attitude generally to prevail. The real question, of course, von Eckardt continued, is to determine how and where one is to stand firm. What does it mean to say that the Western Powers will defend their position in Berlin by force if necessary? He had been informed that discussions were now going on in Washington on this point, that is, finding the precise method of standing firm.

Mr. Murphy noted that he had been interested in German thinking on this subject. While the three Western Powers in Berlin had their own basic responsibilities, German opinion would obviously play an important role. Ambassador Grewe said he had asked again on January 16 for an urgent report of German views, as requested by Mr. Murphy during his earlier meeting with him (Grewe). Mr. Murphy said we were also interested in how we might gain some profit from the situation which the Soviets had precipitated. He felt we should do as much hard thinking on the subject as possible. He, personally, had expected the Soviets to move at an earlier time on Berlin. After all,

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more than three years had passed since the Geneva Conferences. It was realistic to assume that the Soviets were worried about the trend in Germany. Berlin represented a real cause of concern to them. We were wondering how we could exploit the situation in East Germany, and it was essential that we have the benefit of German views on this subject. The Western Powers should not always think of the ultimate danger. This would always frustrate policy. In such an event actions are dictated by fears, rather than by reason.

Dr. von Eckardt said the Western Powers must immediately work out proposals for a solution of the larger German problem. They must have a program for negotiations with the Soviets. Mr. Murphy agreed that the Western Powers could not just give the impression of being static. If there was any one conclusion which could be drawn from the Mikoyan visit, it was that the Soviets wished to negotiate. Mr. Murphy asked what Dr. von Eckardt personally thought about the kind of plans which should be made to meet the issue at the checkpoints should GDR officials turn up there. Should we prosecute our right of access by land and let the Soviets know in advance that we intend to do this? Dr. von Eckardt asked whether Mr. Murphy thought that Mikoyan was going back to the Soviet Union with the impression that the United States firmly intended to maintain its position in Berlin. Mr. Murphy said he thought so, and added that it was psychologically important that the Soviets understand that we will safeguard our rights in Berlin by surface or by air.

Dr. Grewe said that the Soviets would get a clear picture in the United States, but he was not sure what sort of a picture they would get in other capitals. He felt it was necessary that the Soviets should obtain the impression that the West had very definite plans for dealing with the contingency mentioned by Mr. Murphy.

Dr. von Eckardt referred to the danger of war by misunderstanding. Mr. Murphy commented that avoidance of misconceptions by the other side was one of the Secretary's principal concerns - a point he had stressed relative to the Near East, the Far East, and in the present instance. Mr. Murphy then asked what, assuming this to be the situation, von Eckardt thought the Chancellor's views were on the problem of Berlin and the more general one of Germany. Dr. von Eckardt said that as far as Berlin was concerned, the situation was clear. In response to the question posed by Mr. Murphy, he felt that the Chancellor would support defense of land access by force. Dr. Grewe added that he had already told the Secretary this was the German position in principle.

Dr. von Eckardt said that he had learned from Dr. Dittmann that the Foreign Office was working on the second problem, but he did not know what solutions they had come up with. The Chancellor's idea was to stand firm on Berlin, but at the same time he considered it important to offer negotiations to avert a Soviet deadline. In response to Mr. Murphy's query as to whether he believed the Soviet proposal of a peace treaty was intended to get away from the six-month deadline, Dr. von Eckardt indicated that he thought this

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was possible. Dr. von Eckardt stressed the need to stretch out negotiations month after month, and said he did not like the idea of a four day conference under the kleig lights, with each side doing little more than reading prepared statements. He said he thought that the West should begin by putting forward its maximum terms. Dr. Grewe, however, stressed that he agreed with Mr. Merchant that emphasizing the West's maximum terms too much at the beginning would make it harder for the West to show any flexibility. Moreover, there was no point in an extreme program which did not show a willingness to negotiate. Mr. Murphy commented that this was essentially a matter of tactics. Dr. von Eckardt said he agreed, but added that it was not possible to begin with big concessions, keeping nothing in hand for the negotiations themselves.

After Dr. von Eckardt had reiterated that the Allies must begin immediately to discuss their positions, Dr. Grewe noted that Dittmann had proposed that the Four Power Working Group convene in Washington. It could be decided later whether a meeting of the Western Foreign Ministers would be necessary. Dr. von Eckardt said he thought that the Working Group must operate on a different basis than in the past. It must be agreed in advance that all possibilities could be discussed, and that the other three parties would not immediately report to their capitals each theoretical idea raised as representing a governmental proposal. Maybe some good new ideas would emerge from this process. Mr. Murphy noted that an essential point to consider was whether anything could be done to derive profit from the East German situation. Dr. von Eckardt said the Federal Republic, for its part, had been doing everything possible. Some years ago it had opened its border to free movement, and some 2,000,000 visitors a year had come from East Germany, until the Pankow authorities clamped down restrictions.

There was some discussion of certain ideas attributed to General Clay, particularly whether his proposal for making West Berlin the capital of the Federal Republic necessarily involved withdrawal of American forces. Dr. von Eckardt said he had had a talk with General Clay, who apparently had in mind incorporation of Berlin into the NATO system, with the occupation garrisons being replaced by NATO troops which might well include American forces as well as West German forces. Mr. Murphy wondered if introducing NATO into the situation would not just add an additional complication. Dr. von Eckardt thought the Clay proposal was not very practicable. Mr. Murphy noted that he himself was thinking of a closer tie of West Berlin to the Federal Republic. Dr. Grewe commented the Federal Republic had in the past drawn back from any action in this direction because the Three Powers had claimed this would weaken their position in Berlin. If the Soviets were formally to make East Berlin a part of the GDR, that might provide the occasion for some such action.

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